

YEHUDA ELKANA

July 31st , 1975

Professor J. Lederberg
1431 Pittman Avenue
Palo Alto, California
U. S. A.

Dear Josh and Marguerite,

It is summer vacation at the University and instead of a peaceful research summer, the mounting tension in what is happening around Israel is becoming so unbearable that some of it has to be shared with you.

Although I myself am torn between the hours spent in writing a book, which I am still trying to do, and being active on the Israeli scene this letter will not be of the usual contemplative style, weighing of pros and cons. I intend to talk with you about the pending U.N. disaster, and thus my letter will strike a dissonant chord rather than a harmonious academic argument. Since you know my other letters and my usual approach to these issues, I hope I can afford to turn "wild" this time. Still, do not hesitate to correct me if you think I am wrong.

Irrespective of what anybody open-minded and honest thinks about the Arab-Israeli conflict - and I do take into account that a fundamentally open and honest person can be, and is often pro-Arab - Israel's expulsion from the U.N. is a frightening crescendo towards a possible third world war and/or a possible new holocaust. The meaning in legal and in moral terms of such an expulsion is that international law, international sanctions, the judgement of the world community is suspended on any issue which has to do with Israel. It means that the Nazi strategy to create a concept of Mensch and Untermensch will now be legitimized. It means that whoever and whatever wants to do to Israel provided the necessary forces available is permitted to do. It is almost as if most irresponsible acts were invited and encouraged. This has nothing to do with '67 or even '47 borders. This has to do with the fact that the most moderate Arab leader, Sadat, at the very same time that negotiations are being conducted which should lead to peace describes Israel - Israel in any borders - as a "dagger in the back of the Arab nation." What can we expect then of fanatics, like the King of Saudi Arabia, recently adapting himself to the religious enthusiasm of his predecessor, or of Arafat, not to speak of the admittedly non-moderate Georges Habash et company. I do not have to tell you what the relations between such a potential holocaust and a potential third world-war are, but I do have to raise the following question. Is there not a contradiction between the fact that I am appealing to all open-minded fair people irrespective of whether they are basically friendly or unfriendly to Israel, and the fact that I am talking about a Jewish holocaust. The answer to this question is firmly negative. A holocaust, even if it does not lead to a third world war but only to an "uneventful" annihilation of Israel

and its Jews is not a Jewish problem, is not on the level of being pro-Arab or pro-Israeli, is not a question of borders or territories. It is a problem of all open-minded and fair people in the world; even those who will not acknowledge it to-day will carry the moral burden of it for generations, just as it is a problem for all of us that the atrocities of Biafra, Uganda and Bangla-desh could have taken place. To those of you or to those whom you will hopefully approach, and who may say that this approach is hysterical, since surely the Arab nations mean the expulsion of Israel just as a punishment exercise, and being keen on their own economic development they do not mean what they say in their hot-headed rethoric, I am afraid that the only answer could be historical; invoking history is not a watertight argument : I recall Gertrude Stein's famous quote "let me recite to you what history teaches : history teaches". Yet, how many people took Hitler's "Mein Kampf" seriously? Even in 1940-41 the open-minded fair people, many among them Jews- at least those who were still alive - had the same tolerant disbelief of what was coming. I do not think that I am too emotional about it; having been through concentration camps I travel in Europe everywhere and I do not even ask about every German of fifty or more , "what did he do in the war ? " . I certainly do not share George Steiner's thesis that there is a pagan undercurrent in world culture which calls for the ever-renewed destruction of the Jews. What I sense is an immediate, possible and real danger. We, the "doves" in Israel - you know I am one of them - often use the argument that Israel should meet Sadat more than half way, because even if he doesn't really mean peace now, the very dynamics of the process , if it starts once, can turn the tide to the better. But the same argument works in the other direction too. Even if possibly the Arabs are not planning a holocaust now, the dynamics of the process once it starts by stigmatizing the Israelis as "different", as non-people to whom international law does not apply, can turn the tide to this way.

My-our-pleas to you is to approach your governments, parliaments and congress, civil-servants, media, academic friends and the general public, with the demand that if Israel is expelled from the U.N. your governments leave unconditionally the U.N. immediately; let it become clear that the U.N. has lost its meaning ; let Idi Amin and Arafat have their own private party. This will have enormous impact, even beyond the financial collapse of the U.N. , for it will be a moral collapse; but more than that, it will prevent the creation anew of the concept of the Untermensch to whom the laws of the others do not apply. In addition call on your historical and legal resources to remind your governments and media of what happened between the demise of the League of Nations and the horrors of Hitler.

But in order to conclude on a lower key : some of you may think that this is a political issue which has nothing to do with academics ; that when you intervned in the Unesco affair it was in order to prevent politization of Unesco and it was not a political intervention on your part. To those of you I say: this is not a political matter. On the immediate level it is an attempt

to prevent a disaster which is beyond politics. On the abstract level it is an attempt, again apolitical, to save the universal character of the United Nations.

This letter was not easy to write. Forgive me.

Your

Yehuda

See you soon!